

February 13, 2023

Dear Members of the Human Services Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly:

Community Catalyst is pleased to support HB 6616, An Act Concerning Expansion of HUSKY Health Benefits to Those Ineligible Due to Immigration Status, as one of the most promising opportunities to make health coverage for all Connecticut residents a reality. Adjusting access to HUSKY regardless of immigration status is an important step in ensuring immigrants and their families have access to the timely, essential, and quality health care that they need.

Community Catalyst is a leading non-profit national health advocacy organization dedicated to advancing a movement for health equity and justice. We partner with local, state, and national advocates to leverage and build power so all people can influence decisions that affect their health. Health systems will not be accountable to people without a fully engaged and organized community voice. We know that those most at risk under our current health system are people with intersecting marginalized identities and know that their active engagement and leadership are essential to a strong movement. As such, we strongly support Connecticut's efforts to respond to the needs of people for whom affordable health coverage remains out of reach.

We applaud the state's recent policy changes to cover income-eligible children up to 12-years old and for prenatal and 12-months postpartum coverage for pregnant people, regardless of their immigration status. Presently, a dozen states, including Connecticut, plus the District of Columbia, successfully provide or will soon provide medical coverage for children regardless of their immigration status utilizing state-funds.¹ California and Oregon have led the charge to provide state-funded Medicaid coverage for young adults regardless of their immigration status. We are heartened by the prospect of Connecticut following suit.

We support HB 6616 because it offers a pathway to a healthier future. Without health care coverage, many individuals delay seeking care until their condition requires emergency department visits or hospitalization. Lack of access to health care means that chronic health issues, such as diabetes and heart disease, which could be managed, develop into more serious conditions that require more expensive medical interventions in the long-term. Moreover, improving access to coverage and preventive care for immigrants will reduce the disproportionate impact of medical debt that communities of color and people with lower-income face by preventing health issues from developing further and worsening. By shifting the point of access to preventive care, rather than emergent care, Connecticut can see savings upwards of \$63.3 million from reduced uncompensated care costs through the passage and implementation of HB 6616.²

Federal policies implemented at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, which maintained continuous coverage for people who get their health care through Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), allowed Connecticut to achieve one of the most significant reductions in the uninsured

¹ See "Health Care Coverage Maps," National Immigration Law Center (Jan. 2023). <https://www.nilc.org/issues/health-care/healthcoveragemaps/>

² See "Expanding Insurance Coverage to Undocumented Immigrants in Connecticut," RAND Corporation (2022). https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA1964-1.html

rate among children across the country.³ As the country prepares for the unwinding of the public health emergency, which is expected to impact millions of people, it is imperative for Connecticut to protect its gains and implement policies that will ensure that children, including immigrant children and youth, have more pathways to health care coverage.⁴

Through the passage of HB 6616 and other state policy solutions, Connecticut can make significant progress towards meeting the basic health care needs of all Connecticut residents, which will make every community healthier and our national economy stronger. We support HBH 6616 and respectfully ask the Human Services Committee to favorably pass this legislation.

Please contact Colin Reusch at creusch@communitycatalyst.org with any questions.

Sincerely,

Mona Shah
Senior Director of Policy and Strategy
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³ See “Number of Uninsured Children Stabilized and Improved Slightly During the Pandemic,” Georgetown University Health Policy Institute Center for Children and Families (Dec. 2022). <https://ccf.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Georgetown-CCF-Kids-Coverage-Report-2022.pdf>

⁴ See “The Impact of the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency Expiration on All Types of Health Coverage,” Urban Institute (Dec. 2022). <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/impact-covid-19-public-health-emergency-expiration-all-types-health-coverage>